

SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 2018 - John 20:19-31

So I have a confession for all of you this morning. I kind of have a thing for reality tv. I know. I KNOW. But it's true. I do. Back in the day, it was Survivor. Now I'm definitely more of an Amazing Race fan. I like The Voice. But perhaps worst of all is my affection for the reality series Big Brother. In Big Brother a bunch of strangers are sent to live together in a house, participate in competitions and ultimately avoid getting evicted each week in an effort to become the grand prize winner. This love of reality tv is not something I am necessarily proud of, but it often does not matter how much of a train wreck it is to watch or how horrified I am by humankind (and, quite frankly, myself) while watching, sometimes I cannot help but get sucked in.

In more recent years, I have made a discovery that brought my intrigue of reality television to a whole a new level: Spoilers.

For those of you who, like me, did not know this was a "thing," allow me to explain: There are people who have quite literally found a way to make a fairly lucrative living off of either spoiling the endings of the competition-type reality shows or uncovering the inconsistencies in the editing of the docu-series-type reality shows. All of this spoiling is kind of like seeing the man behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*; it spoils the illusion of what television producers are trying to create *on* camera by exposing what is actually happening *behind* the scenes.

Not that long ago, I was sitting on my couch watching the season finale of Big Brother when Kieran came downstairs, watched for a minute or two and then asked me a question about the show. I answered, but then said, "But it's not like it really matters, because I read the spoilers and I know who wins."

To which Kieran replied, "So what is the point of watching, then?" He had a point.

That being said, sometimes I find what is happening behind the scenes *far* more entertaining than what I am seeing on camera. I am the type of person that likes to know how things work; I want to know the story behind the story. I crave details about things that ordinary people never get to see or hear or experience for themselves.

And this craving follows me in my faith. When I read the bible, I always wonder about pieces of the story that never made it to scripture. I am curious about details that really might not make a difference in the grand scheme of things, but that do – in some way – also contribute to the larger narrative of this story of our faith that is still being written.

Which is why something in this morning's scripture piqued my interest this week.

This morning we heard the story of Thomas missing Jesus' appearance to the disciples – sometimes referred to as the Doubting Thomas story. This story shows up in the lectionary every year the week following Easter. Jesus appears to the disciples and shows them the marks on his hands and sides. But Thomas was not with the disciples at the time and when they

shared with him what had happened, he said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

First of all, I have to say that I do kind of feel badly for Thomas. The guy merely asked to see something all of his friends got to see without him and, because of that, he has this unfortunate reputation as being a “doubter”. But I *also* think it is good for us, after we come down off of the high of Easter – with all the excitement of the music, flowers and balloons – to take a moment and ask ourselves, “Wait a moment, what just happened?” and create space for our own doubts in our lives and in our faith.

Because we all have doubts. And those doubts and questions are healthy and normal and create great depth to our faith.

But this week I was struck by something different in this story; something that I have overlooked every other time I have preached on this passage. Verse 30 – the verse that immediately follows Thomas’ conversation with Jesus says:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.”

Which begs the question, what was not written in the book? Clearly *something* happened that never actually made it to scripture. What was it?

I did a little bit of research to see if perhaps anyone knew anything about these “other signs” that were not written down. And while I came up short on that question, I did learn that this verse and also verse 31 were thought to have been the original ending of the Gospel of John. In the translations we have today, there is another chapter where Jesus, again, appears to the disciples, but most scholars believe – based on the differences in language and style – that this was how the original Gospel ended, by essentially saying, “There is more to the story than is written down, but we are ending it right here.”

And this has been driving me crazy all week. What were the other signs? Why were they unwritten? Were they more believable? Less believable? Did the people who were supposed to write them down forget to hand them in on time?

What else happened after that first Easter that we do not know about? What are the untold stories? What piece of the narrative are we missing?

No wonder Thomas had doubts!

Like I said, this has been driving me crazy all week. I want to know the untold stories of Jesus. I want to know what happened, but was never written about.

But since there are not a whole lot of people out there posting “Jesus spoilers,” I have been left to the devices of my own imagination on this one.

Which, I was surprised to discover, got me a lot further than I thought it would.

I connected with a number of my colleagues this week and we all checked in on how everyone's Easter went at their churches. Each person had their own story of a glimpse of resurrection within their own context to tell.

As I was driving home that afternoon, I started thinking about these powerful resurrection stories that we had not only experienced, but also *shared* with one another. And it was in that moment that I realized how important it is to share our faith stories with others. I began to wonder if perhaps Jesus' signs are not all written in the Gospel of John because they are still very much happening *today*, in our lifetime, in the piece of this story *we are* writing.

Friends, resurrection is happening all around us, but the only way people will know this to be true is if we tell them our stories. We have to tell people about those moments in our lives when we thought all was lost and yet grace was found. We have to share the stories from our lives where things were overwhelming and yet hope still found a way to shine. We have to boldly proclaim the times of faith and promise in the midst of suffering and grief.

We are the keepers of the untold stories of our faith and we have to tell these stories. We have to pull back the curtain; we have to show each other what is happening behind the scenes and create beautiful opportunities for *all* people to experience resurrection in real and powerful ways.

The thing is: there are a lot of us who have doubts in this world. For me, we need to make room for doubt in a safe space; we need a safe space not only to experience that doubt, but also hear real stories from our faith. We need to know about this God who offers a never-ending, unconditional love. We need to be inspired to think about the ways resurrection could potentially happen in our lives. For me, Parkminster is that place – that place that welcomes questions, doubts, seeking and deep belief – that place where lives are transformed in the midst of caring community.

We have to tell the untold stories of our faith. We have to continue to share this story; a story I believe is still very much worth sharing.

This morning, I encourage you all to think about what it means to tell the untold stories of our faith; to share real pieces of your real lives where you experienced everything from doubt to belief and to know that those stories can and will make a difference in someone's life.

So let us write our own faith spoilers. And may we be inspired as we experience and share our own resurrection moments this Easter season. Thanks be to God! Amen.